

A Cambridgeshire Windmills Scrapbook 1897 to 1990

Facts, Features and (occasional) Fallacies
reported in Cambridge Newspapers

summarised by

Mike Petty

Many of these stories were featured in my 'Looking Back' column in the Cambridge News from 1996-2014. They are supplemented by some selections 'From our Old Files' published in the Cambridge Independent Press and other notes.

The complete 'Cambridgeshire Scrapbooks' of which this is a small section is published online at bit.ly/CambsCollection

I have digital and other copies of most of the stories summarised.
I hope to publish these online one day. If you would like them in the meantime then please get in touch.

The original volumes are housed in the Cambridgeshire Collection at Cambridge Central Library where there are many other indexes dating back to 1770.

They also have detailed newspaper cuttings files on over 750 topics that have been compiled since the 1960s.

Newspapers sometimes get things wrong. I copy things out incorrectly. Do check

There are a multitude of spelling and layout errors. Please forgive or correct them

News never stops but this file was finished on 31 August 2016.

I will maintain supplements and corrections – contact me for anything you need

Please make what use of these notes that you may. Kindly remember where they came from

See my website – www.mikepetty.org.uk for further notes.

Mike Petty, Stretham

2016

1897 09 23

Messrs Griffiths and Chennell, Newmarket are favoured with instructions to offer for sale by auction all that valuable freehold estate known as **Newmarket Mills**, at which a lucrative business has been carried on for many years. The powerful tower windmill, advantageously situated on a commanding site with the goodwill of the business as a going concern

1902 12 06

Messrs Scruby and Wright sold by auction four brick-built and tiled cottages, nos. 195-199 High Street, Old Chesterton, with outbuildings and gardens, price £310. Two adjoining houses, 64 & 76 Sturton Street, Cambridge, made £330. The family residence, Primrose Croft near Victoria Road with over an acre of land, and the windmill and cottage on the **Milton Road** were not sold.

1906 02 09

The extraordinary weather was experienced in all its bewildering variety. Thunder, lightning, hail, snow and a hurricane provided a new experience. Many pedestrians were blown over by the wind which swept over the mill at **Chippenham** with such suddenness that before the sails could be adjusted, the top of the mill was blown off. The storm travelled at a remarkable pace. It took less than an hour to travel from Leicester to Cambridge. 06 02 09c

1907 04 17

A Cambridge miller told the bankruptcy court his sisters had built a mill on the **Cherry Hinton Road** which he rented. He traded until May 1906 doing good business, but had insufficient capital so he borrowed from the bank. He had dismissed a man at the mill and did without a servant, living on the barest necessities, only giving his wife £3 a week for house-keeping for their family of eleven. 07 04 17a

1907 12 07

Swaffham Bulbeck windmill has passed into the hands of the destroyers. For some time past the top portion of the building, which is over a century old, has been unsafe and as it has only been used occasionally for grinding 'grist' to have spent £100 on its repair would have meant financial loss to the owner. The brickwork foundation, about ten feet in height, will be left and roofed over. 07 12 07

1908

The court heard that under his will dated 1870 Richard Lenton had left his windmill at **Littleport** to his wife and daughters. In 1891 it had been let to Henry Canham who paid the rent until 1898 but as he was in very poor circumstances the executor had not pressed him for it until 1906 when he went to Littleport and found that Canham was dead. William Walker had possession of the mill but refused to return the keys until he'd been repaid for the rates and taxes he'd spent on it. CWN 33 10 03 p7 – wrong

1909 02 19

Albert Howe of **Fordham**, miller, told the bankruptcy court that he began business in 1893, having been apprenticed at the mill he took over. He had no money. A friend bought him and horse and cart and the harness-maker made a set of harness on credit. About seven years ago he bought a second mill for £290, paying £15 deposit and the remainder he had borrowed. His brother had been living at the mill, for which he paid £20 a year. People owed him money but he allowed their accounts to run as he did not want to lose trade. 09 02 19

1910 11 18

The rising ground near **Histon** Station was the scene of operations by the C.U.O.T.C. It included an advance across country by the infantry battalion on a position near the windmill where a very strong gun emplacement had been constructed complete with communications trenches. The attackers crept cautiously to within 50 yards of the position without a sound being heard, then swarmed over the breastworks. A dummy gun was blown up with a thunderous boom which rolled away over the countryside. 10 11 18 & a.

1912 03 08

Members of the University Officers' Training Corp together with the Leys, Perse and County School O.T.C. took part in night operations with the Honorary Artillery Company from London. A brisk engagement in the vicinity of Arbury Camp culminated in the capture and blowing-up of a gun posted at the windmill near **Histon** station. The night was not favourable for a surprise attack, the moon was shining brightly and the defenders opened fire. Soon a brisk musketry duel was in progress. 12 03 08b

1912 06 21

The **Cottenham** miller said that when the landlord gave up in 1916 he'd rented the windmill from him but began to get behind with the payments about 12 years ago. One of his men embezzled money and then hung himself. That took all the money he was using for trading purposes and he never recovered. In Cottenham they'd taken to growing fruit instead of corn and that had made pounds of difference to him. Latterly business had got so bad he could not find the cash to send his cart out to get a load of stuff to keep at work so he thought it was time to do something. 12 06 21

1912 07 19

The old windmill which for more than a century has been a familiar feature on the Rampton Road at Cottenham is being pulled down. It is the last of the four mills which up to about 25 years ago did a fairly good business in the flour and grist trade. Truly the old order changeth and milling as a village industry had departed. Cheese-making has long been abandoned, the malting business and the numerous local breweries are all closed and other industries, principally fruit, have taken their place. 12 07 19j

1912 09 20a

A **Hildersham** miller and baker told the bankruptcy court he'd started in 1886 with a windmill at **Ickleton**, then worked as a baker in London. In 1904 he bought Hildersham mill with two cottages from Mr French for £150 and built a bakehouse. He'd ground and sold the new Standard bread, advertising a great deal and got special vans and extra horses. But his attempts to sell in Cambridge had failed. So he started a shop in Linton for a few months but could not make it pay 12 09 20a & b

1912 12 08

Cottenham materials of old windmill on Rampton Road sold by auction – 12 12 06g

1913 01 03

Ely windmill fire 13 01 03

1913 11 07

Charles Spicer was working alone at the windmill, Ely Road, **Stretham**; his wife took his tea up to him but as he had not returned home by nine, she went with her young son in search of him. The mill was all in darkness but was still grinding corn. Mr Mason, the owner of the mill came with a light and eventually Mr Spicer was discovered dead. Excepting a short interval he had worked in the same mill for about 40 years. No inquest was deemed necessary 13 11 07 p11

1925 08 07

Sawston's sewerage system being in level country it constantly needs flushing and for this purpose the Parish Council has been paying labour. A scheme was now proposed by which water would be raised by windmill pump on land standing in the highest part of the village to flush out the pipes. At Linton people emptied refuse into the gutterways so that the matter ran into the river and accumulated there.

1928 07 09

Close to the windmill on the north side of **Milton Road**, opposite Chesterton Hall Crescent, occupying one of the highest and healthiest sites in the locality and surrounded by spacious lawns and trim walks stands the new open-air school for defective and sub-normal children. It is an ideal school, admirably adapted to its purpose and planned and equipped on a generous scale, a veritable

children's paradise. The opening ceremony was an open-air function. Open air schools for delicate children have come to stay and in the future all schools will probably become open-air

1929 03 27

Some interesting observations on windmills were made by Mr H.C. Hughes to the Cambridge Photographic Club. His talk was illustrated by large number of slides. The oldest drawing of a mill in existence was in Longstanton church, cut in the clunch of the porch. Doubtless as the miller was always a bad man his boy took after him and having been turned out of church had spent the time drawing his father's mill on the church. He spoke of the mill at Haverhill with its rotary vanes, the six-sailed mill at Wisbech and the mills at Stretham and Fulbourn, both of which were still working. The latter should be preserved if any should, so beautiful was it on the long rolling slopes behind the Roman road.

1932 05 26

Bourn windmill worked until about six years ago when the sails were damaged in a gale. It was bought by Mansfield Forbes using money collected at an exhibition of Epstein's 'Genesis' at 'Finella'. Now it has been repaired by Hunts of Soham and will be presented to the Cambridge Preservation Society 32 05 26a

1932 06 04

Bourn windmill was handed over to the Cambridge Preservation Society. It was probably the oldest in the country and cannot be economically used today. However it was pretty and on that criterion alone it is worth preserving. It was quite possible it would be made into a Youth Hostel. 32 06 04

1935 08 23

Many years ago **Madingley** windmill was as famous a landmark as those at Bourn or Fulbourn. But in 1909 a great gale blew the mill down and the oak timbers were so badly smashed as to make restoration impossible. Now the Squire of Madingley has purchased an old post-mill at Ellington. There are four sails and the timbers are in an excellent state of preservation. Workmen are engaged in the delicate task of dismantling the mill and foundations are now being dug for it to be erected on the old site at Madingley Hill. 35 08 23

1937 06 08

Radio Society set up radio station near windmill at St Ives – 37 06 08

1938 12 24

Lombardy Poplar by Catholic church was planted by Julian Skrine in his garden at 'Lensfield' the grounds of which extended to where Catholic Church now stands; has photo of garden showing windmill in Mill Road. 38 12 24b

1945 01 26

Soham Mere windmill may be taken over by County Council as an ancient monument – 45 01 26

1946 01 17

Cambridgeshire craftsmen – R.C. Lambeth talk on blacksmiths, windmills, cricket bat makers – 46 01 17a

1946 06 07

Steeple Morden windmill fire damaged engine room and hopper – 46 06 07

1953 09 02

After pouring thousands of gallons of water on to a fire at Great **Sampford** the brigades ran short of water and had to fall back on the river to supplement their supplies. The outbreak started in a barn at Stow Farm beside the High Street and flames swept across the street, which was blocked for more than three hours, and set fire to a cottage. The fire also reached a converted windmill but local workmen put out the flames before they could do any serious damage. Lots of old wartime members of the A.F.S. left their work and 'mucked in' with the fire brigade. The fire cut telephone wires and a fireman had to borrow a private car to dash to Radwinter to call for more pumps.

1954 03 03

Haddenham windmill, a landmark in the fens, may become a dangerous structure if it is not repaired soon. Experts estimate it would cost about £2,000 to put it into a sound condition. It was last in use about nine years ago and is still owned by the miller who worked it then. It is scheduled as an historic building but the Ministry will not make a grant to aid its preservation. In a letter to The Times, Mr P.G. Norman, secretary of the Friends of Haddenham, says it was built in 1803, its machinery and sails are intact and it is not beyond repair

1955 07 16

The windmill at Adventurer's Fen, **Wicken** stands on a very isolated very isolated spot. The whole direction of the drainage was changed when the fen was brought back into cultivation during the war. It could never again work in that position and may have gone the way of its neighbour in Sedge Fen. But thanks to Rex Wailes and Mr Doran of the Great Ouse River Board it is to be repaired and moved to the entrance of Wicken Sedge Fen where it will be seen by visitors. The work has been entrusted to Mr C.J. Ison of Histon who himself moved the post mill at Madingley to its present site. The cost will be borne by Lord Fairhaven. 55 07 16c

1956 09 06

The old brick windmill in **Hurst Park Avenue** was built in 1855 by J.M. Mann and ended its working days some 60 years ago when the sails were removed. The mill was last operated by William French from Hildersham whose family have been millers for four generations. It is now used as storage by S.A. Rose, the butcher, whose slaughterhouse once stood close by. 56 09 06

1956 09 12

The windmill on Station Road, **Willingham** has been demolished. The owner, Tony Manning, was reluctant to have this well-known landmark destroyed but it had become unsafe. It was offered to various organisations concerned with ancient monuments but without success. The main sail was about 35 feet long and nearly 18 inches thick at the centre. 56 09 12a

1956 09 22

A fen drainage windmill has been re-erected in **Wicken** fen. Norman's Mill stood in Adventurer's Fen, a mile to the south, and was operating until the early 1930's after which it fell into disuse and suffered considerable interference by people visiting the fen. The restoration was undertaken by C.J. Ison of Histon. They discovered the right way to go to work by trial and error, guided by what they found when they dismantled the old structure. Little more than the iron parts of the wheelers and gears remain from the original mill 56 09 22a & b

1957 04 04

Bulldozers are clearing the ground for house building in **Hurst Park Avenue** where the hundred foot windmill and Mill Cottage are to be pulled down. There has been a mill on the site since the 16th century although the present building is about 120 years old. It has been a landmark for aircraft from local aerodromes and for many years has been a home for pigeons. 57 04 04a

1958 09 02

The old smock windmill at **Willingham** is grinding corn again whenever the wind blows strong enough to send the big sails on the move. For the last two years Ray Cattell had despaired of finding someone to make the necessary repairs to the back of the two remaining sails, for such craftsmen are practically non-existent. But the problem was dealt with by young Graham Wilson, one of the many visitors, who has just spent his holiday doing the job. 58 09 02a

1959 11 06

Gt Chishill windmill – county to purchase? – 59 11 06h

1960 08 18

Somewhere in the field around **Eltisley** there may be hidden £1,000 of gold communion plate from the village church which disappeared 400 years ago. Ancient records show that two chalices and a gold cross have been missing since the reign of Edward VI. The church was sacked during that

turbulent time and churchwarden John Rose thinks villagers may have hidden them under an old windmill. But nobody now knows where it stood 60 08 18

1960 12 02

A love of windmills has led Graham Wilson to buy the tower mill at **Over**. Built about 100 years ago, it was in regular use until the 1930s and the interior machinery is still in working order. Graham has plans for restoring the roof-cap and the great transverse beam that carries the sails. He is a qualified miller and sees no reason why it should not come into use again for grinding farmers' corn. The Council for the Preservation of Rural England has made a grant of £20 towards the project 60 12 02a

1961 03 17

Hemingford Grey windmill was built in 1820, shortly before the coming of steam power, and its hand-made wooden machinery is still in good preservation. It is one of the few mills with a fireplace and has been the last working mill in Huntingdonshire. But now the sweeps are no more and the wooden cupola roof has collapsed and there are plans to convert it into an artist's studio. The top two floors would be used as a studio, giving ample height for large canvases, with light coming from a glass domed roof. 61 01 24

1961 03 17a

Fulbourn windmill to be restored – 61 03 17b

1961 08 16

Artist Jeanette Jackson and her husband are converting the old windmill at **Hemingford Grey** into a house and studio. It is this mill which has inspired her 15 paintings now on exhibition in London. The miller's horse and cart stables have been converted into living quarters and the loose box into a bedroom. The corn store is now a modern kitchen and the whole stable block joined by a glass veranda. The millstones will form the entrance steps and the huge wooden finial which once topped the windmill is to have place of honour on the ground floor. The hardest job was the cutting of the 140-year-old cast iron shaft which carried the sails. 61 08 16

1962 03 09

In 1803 Robert Willis built **Stapleford** smock windmill on the road to the Gogs. The mill ceased to function in 1910 but continued to provide a shelter for many an owl, jackdaw and wood pigeon until it quietly collapsed on June 22 1945. All that remains is the spinney which protected it from the northern blasts, the lintel of the door with 'R.W. 1803' engraved thereon and the mill stones, one of which may grace a local garden. The land on which the mill once stood has been cleared and will now grow corn which will be sent elsewhere to be ground. 62 03 09a

1963 04 06

Civic Trust awards for **West Wrattling** windmill, Fisons Pest Control, Bradwell's Court and Chatteris market hill garden – 63 04 06b

1963 12 13

Little Chishill post mill has been bought by Cambridgeshire County Council in order to preserve it. Several mills in the county have already received the attention of the Cambridge Preservation Society but now the Council is trying to ensure that one example of every type of mill is preserved. The post mill gained its name from being mounted on top of a wooden post so it can be turned into the wind. It is the earliest type of windmill known in Western Europe 63 12 13c

1964 12 11

There were originally three windmills owned by the Nunn family but as they were superseded the buildings fell into disuse. Two were pulled down and the other, at Kneesworth, was converted into living quarters for the servants who worked for Dr Edmond Nunn. After removing the top portion, which carried the huge sails, he had it rebuilt in the style of the ancient John o' Gaunt's tower which stood down the Old Fen. Unfortunately vandals have completely ransacked it of its fittings. But Mrs George Oliver can clearly remember it and the small railway which ran down the Drift on which little trucks full of the milled flower were manhandled as far as the main road - 64 12 11a

1966 07 28

Chishill windmill renovation – 66 07 28a

1966 11 30

New GPO mast towers over windmill at **Over** – 66 11 30

1975 11 21

Work started this week to preserve the surviving timbers of **Fulbourn** windmill. It will be the start of a four-year plan of restoration aimed at reviving the 167-year-old mill to its former looks. But sadly the ancient structure will never grind wheat again as the estimate for complete restoration back to a working mill is nearly £30,000. However an enthusiastic band of volunteers hope to set up a windmill society to financially support the restoration. It is at present owned by Dr Leslie Woollaston who has offered it to the trust and is 'delighted' to see the work being carried out.

1976 09 09

Cambridgeshire planners are prepared to pay anyone who is interested in taking one of the oldest windmills in England – the 17th century Post Mill at Great **Gransden** – off their hands. But the new 'owner' will have to be prepared to spend up to £26,000 on repairing and restoring it. The mill is one of the oldest known examples of its kind – and because of the expense of putting it right, it is rapidly becoming an embarrassment to the county council. Architectural and windmill restoration experts have estimated that up to £7,000 needs to be spent on repairs just to make the building safe. The mill was bought by the former Huntingdonshire County Council almost 20 years ago. When Cambridgeshire County Council took over three years ago the mill was closed on safety grounds.

1977 0 10

Bourn windmill is expected to be in working order again in the Spring following the battering it received in last winter's gales. One pair of sails were torn off in a storm, but all four are being renewed, for it was discovered that the remaining pair were in such a bad state that a thorough restoration was needed. When the Cambridge Preservation Society embarked on the restoration work it was estimated that it would cost around £4,000. But the state of the remaining sails and their replacement has now boosted the costs to more than £7,000. Bourn Mill, a post mill which dates back to the mid 17th century is reputedly the oldest surviving windmill in the country.

1977 10 31

Restoration work on the picturesque **Bourn** windmill was officially completed this weekend. Millwright, Mr Phil Davies, put the finishing touches to the £7,000 job earlier this month and it was left to his wife to unveil a commemorative plaque above the entrance to the mill, reputed to be one of the oldest in the country. Work on the mill started after two sails were torn off during the gales of January 1976. When the Cambridge Preservation Society embarked on the restoration work it was estimated it would cost about £3,000 but the state of the other sails pushed the costs up.

1978 08 16

Doubts about restoring the semi-derelict **Fulbourn** windmill are likely to be settled by the setting up of a village trust to lease it from the new owner. The Windmill Society hopes the deal will make it possible to continue the restoration work, begun in 1974. Since then timber has been weatherproofed and the aim is to restore the mill to something like the condition of its heyday when it was used for grinding villagers' corn. The main task at present involves renewing the floors and three months have been earmarked for the work.

1979 05 23

Lightning struck **Willingham** windmill and started a fire in straw round the base of the 150-year-old mill. It came during a sudden thunderstorm and one terrific thunderclap shook doors and windows all around the village. But it was not until two hours later than a passer-by noticed the charred and smouldering wood of the sail and raised the alarm. Mr Ray Cattell, aged 73, who owns the mill which has been in his family for generations managed to douse most of the fire at the base but it took firemen with a turntable ladder to tackle the still smouldering sail about 60 feet above the ground. They had to remove about a third of the sail because it had been weakened by the lightning.

1980 08 14

Working windmills may return to the East Anglian countryside – not to drain the fens or mill corn, but to generate electricity. Scientists at Cambridge University's Cavendish Laboratory have been working on wind turbine design with the Central Electricity Generating Board who will shortly begin looking for an inland site for the first large wind-powered generating machine. These could be sited in flat lands where their impact on the environment would be less than on exposed hilltops. They would be mounted on towers 150 feet high and when their 200-foot blades turned each machine should generate enough electricity to heat 100 single-bar electric fires. 80 08 14b

1981 10 09

Restoration of the 18th-century windmill at **Dalham** has ground to a halt. Although the wooden body and cap to the smock mill have been rebuilt, work on the machinery and the replacement of the sails will remain unfinished as the owner and Suffolk County Council cannot agree which contractor should complete the job. 81 10 09a

1982 03 18

Tests are being carried out to try and date **Great Gransden** windmill. In 1950 Huntingdonshire County Council spent £2,000 strengthening and propping it up with iron stays. Now it is being restored and may be opened to the public. But the machinery will not be assembled because the money allowed for the job does not include its return to working order. 82 03 18a

1983 02 07

Impington windmill appeal – 83 02 07

1983 05 14

Haddenham Mill House has been restored and made into a comfortable home. But the adjacent windmill is a major restoration project. The mill was built in 1803 and stopped working in 1945. The top was off and it stood open to the weather until recently, adding to its deterioration. Now the two properties are on the market for £52,000. Any purchaser will have a comfortable house to live in while he contemplates what to do about it. 83 05 14 p12

1984 12 08

Stretham windmill feature – 84 12 08a & b

1985 06 14

Bourn windmill renovated – 85 06 14a

1985 06 24

Derek Harris makes models of windmills – 85 06 24

1986 10 08

The ornamental cock pheasant which was ripped from the top of **West Wrattling's** village sign has been put back – and this time it will take a stick of gelignite to shift it. Vandals tore down the carved wooden bird which sat on top of a painting of a local landmark, the windmill, within hours of it being unveiled earlier in the summer. After an outcry it was left at the base of the plinth a couple of days later. Now it has been secured with steel bolts. 86 10 08a

1987 05 16

The windmill at **Lt Wilbraham** is believed to date from 1820. Back in the 1930s it was a sorry state but was saved from dereliction before it became too dilapidated. It was not until 1965 that it was first used as a dwelling after a careful conversion by local architect Cecil Bourne. The interior has cedar panelling taken from Quy Hall but retains enough atmosphere to recall the days when the rumbling of the sails and the grinding of the mill wheel were a part of village life. The sails were removed five years ago after many years exposure to the weather and it would be quite an expense to replace them. Now it is on the market for £100,000. 87 05 16

1987 07 30

The tumble-down windmill at **Wicken** is being restored to its former glory thanks to a group of dedicated enthusiasts. They have sunk thousands of pounds into a six-year project to bring it back to working condition. First they must rebuild the three wooden floors which have been eaten away by woodworm and dry rot. The mill was worked by sails until the late 1930's when they were considered dangerous but much of the original machinery is still in place. A new aluminium cap was put on in 1971 by Chris Wilson, the owner of Over mill who is assisting with the project 87 07 30a

87 11 21

Orwell windmill converted into house – 87 11 21